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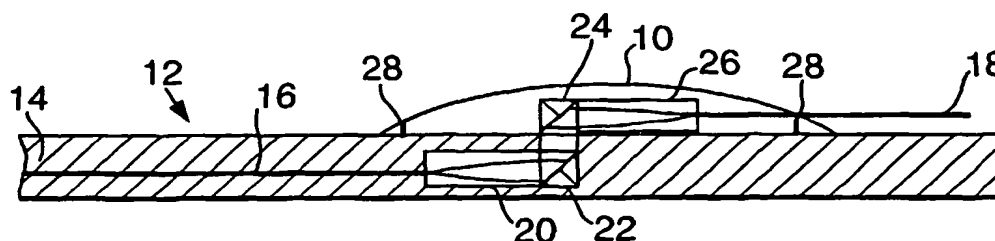
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(54) Title: SURFACE-MOUNTABLE INTERFACE MODULE FOR INTERROGATION OF EMBEDDED OPTICAL SENSORS



(57) Abstract: A surface-mountable interface module is attached to a central surface portion of a composite structure to interface with an optical transmission means embedded in the composite structure. The module has a mating surface for coupling to the composite structure to define an intersection between the module and the central surface portion, and contains interface optics to manipulate light that, in use, passes between the module and the optical transmission means through the intersection. A "smart" variant of the module contains interrogation means for interrogating a sensor system associated with the optical transmission means, and power means for powering components within the module.

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## **SURFACE-MOUNTABLE INTERFACE MODULE FOR INTERROGATION OF EMBEDDED OPTICAL SENSOR**

This invention relates to interfacing optical transmission structures and more particularly, though not exclusively, to techniques for coupling a first optical transmission means, such as an optical fibre that is embedded within a composite to a second optical transmission means, such as another optical fibre that is external to the composite.

In general, the term 'composite' as used herein is to be construed broadly unless the context demands otherwise. That term is directed to any support structure carrying an embedded optical transmission means, the support structure and the optical transmission means therefore together defining the composite. The term includes multi-layer structures but does not require the support structure itself necessarily to be a composite, although the support structure often will be a composite material in its own right. Typical composites are aircraft panels and other supportive structures made, for example, from plastics materials, carbon fibre, glass or metal.

Fibre optics embedded in composite structures can provide elegant distributed and embedded sensing functions, for example of strain or temperature, as well as the potential for embedded communications links. The use of optical fibres and advanced composites is becoming more accepted in the aircraft industry over the previous systems of electrical wiring and lightweight metals respectively. There are many advantages to the use of optical fibres, such as reduced weight, elimination of electromagnetic problems such as noise pick up and incidental radiation of signals, lower raw material costs, and elimination of potentially dangerous conductive paths.

These advantages are clearly desirable, and the functionality of embedded optical fibres is proven. However, the use of such optical systems in aerospace systems presents its own specific challenges, different to those associated with conventional

systems, which have to date slowed acceptance of this new technology. For example, problems remain as to the best way of interfacing (i.e. launching and extracting light) to/from the embedded fibres. Additionally, the interrogation components/system must be accommodated wherever they can conveniently fit, usually within the main structure to which the composite structure is attached or of which the composite structure forms a part. For example, where the composite structure forms part of an aircraft, the main structure may be the airframe of that aircraft.

One interfacing technique, described in US Patent No. 5,299,273, involves attaching a relatively large optical connector to a composite laminate part having an optical fibre embedded therein. The optical connector is attached by trimming the structure across the path of the optical fibre thereby exposing an end of the fibre that lies flush with the surface of the structure. Then the optical fibre is polished and the connector is fitted using micro-positioning techniques to correctly align the connector and optical fibre.

Other current interfacing solutions include allowing delicate embedded fibres to emerge from the structure surface or edge (so called 'flying leads'), or embedding fibre connectors in a surface of the composite at the ends or sides of embedded optical fibres for subsequent connection to external optical devices or other optical fibres. Examples of the latter type of coupling are shown in US 5,809,197 and in the paper by S. Meller, J. Greene, C. Kozikowski, K. Murphy, R. Claus, *"Polymer and Metal-Matrix Composite-Embedded Optical Fibres for Avionics Communications Links,"* SPIE Proceedings, Vol. 3042, pp. 383-388, 1997.

The provision of flying leads is problematical in that these are potential single points of failure during use of the composite. As well as being prone to damage, the fibres must be managed during composite manufacture (e.g. lay-up), which increases

manufacturing complexity, time and cost. Likewise, the provision of conventional embedded connectors at the composite surface can also complicate the manufacturing process particularly since these embedded connectors tend to be bulky and require careful protection. Additionally, resin accretion can occur around these connectors, and also in the case of flying leads; this can lead to embrittlement and contamination effects.

Generally, therefore, all of the above methods suffer from the problem of potential damage to the optical fibres emerging from the composite and to the embedded connectors present at the surface of the composite when the composite needs to be finished in its manufacturing process. These problems have hindered the universal acceptance of embedded optical fibre systems within the aerospace industry.

The Applicant's co-pending UK Patent Application Nos. 0000405.1 and 0000415.0 by the same inventors aim to overcome or at least substantially to reduce the above described problems. In those patent applications, techniques are presented for creating the interface to embedded fibre systems after composite panels had been manufactured. The fibres and any interface optics remain buried and hence hidden in the structure until after manufacture. An interface to the fibres is then formed by one of various techniques. The result is the formation of optical ports or windows that allow interfacing to the fibres buried in the composite. As the interface is created after composite manufacture, there is no need to manage, or risk of damage to, the delicate trailing fibre leads.

The present invention relates closely to the Applicant's UK Patent Application Nos. 0000405.1 and 0000415.0, the contents of which are therefore incorporated herein by reference. The invention aims to simplify the interfacing and interrogation of embedded fibre systems and to provide more robust systems with benefits in terms of lifetime, cost and ease of maintenance. The invention may therefore be expected

to speed the implementation of embedded fibre systems in the aerospace industry.

The invention resides in a surface-mountable interface module for attachment to a composite structure to interface with an optical transmission means embedded in the composite structure, the module containing interface optics to manipulate light that, in use, passes between the module and the optical transmission means, and interrogation means for interrogating a sensor system associated with the optical transmission means. This provides a compact, self-contained 'smart' module.

The interrogation means can comprise sensor means for sensing parameters of light entering the module from the optical transmission means embedded in the composite structure. The module can then include data output means for outputting sensor data from the sensor means to a remote location for display and/or processing.

The module of the invention is advantageously suitable for attachment to a central surface portion of the composite structure and has a mating surface for coupling to the composite structure to define an intersection between the module and the central surface portion. The interface optics therefore manipulate light that, in use, passes between the module and the optical transmission means through the intersection.

This specification ascribes a particular meaning to 'central surface portion' which is an interior portion of a surface, in the sense of being surrounded by other portions of that surface in a landlocked manner. This is to be distinguished from a peripheral portion of the surface defining an edge because, unlike the bulky edge-mounted optical connectors of the prior art, the module of the invention is suitable for application to such a central surface portion. However, the module of the invention could also be applied to a peripheral surface portion if needs be.

For optimum compactness, the module preferably includes beam-turning means for turning light from or into a direction substantially parallel to the central surface portion of the composite structure, respectively before or after the passage of said light through the intersection.

In general, it is advantageous for the module to present a streamlined exposed surface when the module is attached to the composite structure with the mating surface coupled to the central surface portion of the composite structure. The exposed surface may therefore have a convex, dome-like structure of part-elliptical cross-section. It is also possible for the exposed surface to be cuboidal. The term 'blister' is used in the description that follows to convey the idea of a small raised module that can sit neatly on the composite surface.

As the central surface portion of the composite structure will often be substantially planar, the mating surface can also be substantially planar. In cross-section, the mating surface and the exposed surface of the module advantageously intersect around the periphery of the module at an acute mutual internal angle.

Elegantly, the mating surface of the module is preferably penetrated by an optical port that communicates with the interface optics within the module. Those interface optics, which can be embedded within the module for optimum robustness, suitably comprise an optical interface portion adapted to interface with a co-operating optical interface portion in the composite structure.

The module may further comprise an external optical transmission means, which means may be a fibre optic link. A secondary light source can be integrated within the module to launch light into the external optical transmission means, as can an amplifier means to amplify light thus launched.

Locating formations such as one or more pins may be provided to co-operate with complementary locating formations in or on the composite structure.

It is preferred that the module includes some integral sensor components such as a filter or a coupler.

The module can contain a light source means to generate light and to launch that light directly or indirectly into the optical transmission means embedded in the composite structure. For instance, the light source means can be coupled to the interface optics of the module or can be arranged to launch light directly into an interface within the composite structure.

Power means can be included within the module for powering components within the module as may be necessary. The power means may comprise opto-electronic power means for receiving optical energy and converting that energy into electrical energy, in which case provision may be made for a multi-mode optical fibre link to convey optical energy to the module. Alternatively, the power means can be powered via an umbilical electrical power link.

Where external power or data links are connected to the module, the module conveniently comprises externally-accessible optical or electrical connectors to enable releasable attachment of the power or data links to the module.

The invention extends to a composite structure comprising a support structure carrying an embedded optical transmission means, and having an interface module as defined above attached thereto in optical communication with the embedded optical transmission means. The interface module is preferably attached to a central surface portion of the structure. The invention also encompasses a method of making such a composite structure, the method comprising forming a passageway in

the support structure to create an optical port between the embedded optical transmission means and the exterior of the composite structure, and attaching an interface module of the invention to the composite structure over the optical port.

The method generally involves aligning the interface optics within the module with the optical port formed in the support structure, which is advantageously achieved by aligning the aforementioned co-operating locating formations provided by the module and the composite structure. The module can then be bonded to the composite structure.

Accordingly, the invention presents a module that can interface simply onto the surface of a composite structure, enabling light to be introduced/extracted from an embedded fibre system and having the potential to integrate interrogation components also within the module. Given that an optical interface can be formed in this way, the invention allows use of this interface together with integration of sensor interrogation components. The invention provides a module that uses this interface in an efficient manner, a structure to which the module is attached, and a method for making such a structure.

In order that this invention can be more readily understood, reference will now be made, by way of example, to the accompanying drawings in which:

Figure 1 is a schematic sectional side view of a simple surface blister concept in which the blister module houses one half of an optical interface and connection to a fibre optic link, and in which interrogation of the embedded fibre system is performed remotely;

Figure 2 is an enlarged and more detailed schematic sectional side view corresponding to Figure 1, showing a blister module providing one half of the



interface to an embedded fibre system and employing a simple collimated beam technique for the purposes of illustration; and

Figure 3 is a part-sectioned side view combined with an enlarged schematic sectional side view of a 'smart' surface blister module attached to an embedded fibre composite surface, within which module the light sources and components to interrogate the sensor system are integrated.

The simplest realisation of the invention is illustrated schematically in Figure 1 of the drawings. Here, an interface blister module 10 is attached to a composite structure 12 comprising a support structure, carrier or matrix 14 in which is embedded an optical transmission means in the form of an optical fibre 16. An intersection is thereby defined between the module 10 and the composite structure 12. The module 10 provides a fibre optic link 18, for example to remote interrogation equipment (not shown) for interrogation of the embedded fibre system 16, and optics to interface directly with other optics in the composite structure 12 that communicate with the embedded fibre 16. The module 10 therefore houses one half of an optical interface, the other co-operating half of which is in the composite structure 12. This interface bridges the intersection between the module 10 and the composite structure 12.

It will be noted that the module 10 of Figure 1 presents a streamlined exposed surface when the module 10 is attached to the composite structure 12 with a planar mating surface defining the underside of the module 10 coupled to a correspondingly planar central surface portion of the composite structure 12. The exposed surface of the module 10 is convex-curved into a dome shape of part-elliptical cross-section. The mating surface and the cross-section of the exposed surface intersect at the periphery of the module 10 mutually to define an acute internal angle, to the benefit of robustness, compactness and streamlining.

There are several ways in which the optical interface of Figure 1 can work. The more detailed view of Figure 2 shows one such way, in which the interface simply employs an expanded collimated beam or beamlets between the embedded fibre and the fibre optic link. Other interface techniques are possible; some will be outlined later.

The interface structure of Figure 2 is constructed in steps. Initially, a first beam-collimating micro-optical component 20 and a first beam-turning mirror 22 are embedded into a matrix during manufacture of the composite structure 12. After manufacture of the composite structure 12, a passageway is tunnelled through the matrix 14 to create an optical port between the first beam-turning mirror 22 and the exterior of the composite structure 12, thereby to channel light emerging from the first micro-optical component 20 through the optical port out of the composite structure 12. The passageway can be formed using various techniques, but preferably by the ablative laser machining methods described in the Applicant's aforementioned UK Patent Application Nos. 0000405.1 and 0000415.0.

Once the passageway is formed, the blister module 10 is attached to the external surface of the composite structure 12 over the optical port defined by the passageway. The module 10 can be bonded to the composite structure 12, formed *in situ* and/or held to the composite structure 12 by fasteners (not shown). The module 10 is positioned to bring a second beam-turning mirror 24 embedded within the module 10 into register with the optical port and hence into opposition with the first beam-turning mirror 22, so as to redirect light emerging from the port into a direction parallel to the surface of the composite structure 12. From the second beam-turning mirror 24, the light passes through a second micro-optical component 26 embedded within the module 10 and thence into the fibre optic link 18 that leads out of the module 10 as shown.

Locating pins 28 are an optional feature that are shown in Figure 2 but are applicable

to other embodiments of the invention. These pins 28 ensure correct alignment between the module 10 and the port and help to hold the module 10 in place against external forces once so positioned. The pins 28 can project from the external surface of the composite structure 12 into correspondingly-positioned recesses in the flat underside of the module 10 or conversely can project from the underside of the module 10 into correspondingly-positioned recesses in the external surface of the composite structure 12. Other complementary co-operating locating formations will be evident to the skilled reader.

Turning now to Figure 3, this shows a 'smart' blister module 30 attached to a composite structure 12 containing an embedded fibre 16. Fibre sensor systems may require interrogation, where the light returned from the structure 12 is detected and sensed and the measurand is extracted from the light parameters, such as intensity through filters, wavelength shift introduced by strain/temperature and so on. The components for achieving this function are optionally integrated wholly or in part within the thus 'smart' interface blister 30. So, in this embodiment, the light source(s) and/or at least part of the componentry necessary to interrogate the sensor system are integrated within the module 30, along with the interface to the embedded fibre system 16. The interface itself can take many forms, as discussed elsewhere in this specification, and can be constructed by the abovementioned techniques.

A light source 32 such as an LED or a laser is housed within the blister module 30 of Figure 3, preferably pigtailed with optical fibre 34 to couple to the interface 36 as shown. Means 38 are provided for optical to electrical conversion whereby a multi-mode fibre link 40 to the blister module 30 provides optical power which is then converted to electrical power in the blister module 30, this in turn powering the light source 32 to launch light into the embedded fibre sensor system 16 via the interface 36.

The components within the module of Figure 3 are powered optically via opto-electronic conversion but could be powered electrically if preferred. However, in the preferred embodiment illustrated, fibre optic links provide power and/or data output channels.

The arrangement of the invention in Figure 3 embodies the concept of combining a fibre interface with power and processing in a streamlined module 30 that can be attached to the external surface of the composite structure. Fibre links 42 can provide power and/or data links for the output, or electrical connections could be made. The complexity of the module 30 would depend on the size and complexity of the individual components. Integration of various components and their functions onto a custom integrated opto-electronic circuit is also envisaged.

In all of these embodiments, the blister module 10; 30 is a robust interface-half with fibre optic leads attached. The blister module 10; 30 provides strain relief to the fibres of the fibre link so minimising the risk of damage, which would be of concern if conventional fibre connections were made into the composite structure.

Many variations are possible within the inventive concept. For example, the interface within the composite structure 12 could be of other design e.g. an evanescent interface or coupling in which the embedded fibre 16 is polished back near to the core to create a side coupling surface and the side coupling surface of another, mating, evanescent fibre is brought into contact with the side coupling surface of the first evanescent fibre 16 to couple light in/out of the structure 12. The purpose of evanescent coupling is that it enables a branching structure to be created such that the signal being transmitted along the optical fibre 16 can be split between the existing embedded optical fibre 16 and another optical fibre external to a composite 12 in which the fibre 16 is embedded. This form of coupling allows side-access to fibres in an efficient way, and may employ an interface coupler block to optically align

the respective polished side coupling surfaces of the optical fibres.

In another embodiment (not shown), optical fibres with polished side coupling surfaces are replaced by D-fibres in the composite and in the blister module. D-fibres are similar to side-polished fibres and have a 'D' cross-section or profile defining a flat side close to the fibre core that gives them a reduced alignment tolerance compared to other optical fibre geometries. In other words, D-fibres are relatively insensitive to misalignment. Two such fibres laid flat together, flat side to flat side, will couple light between them, and the angle of overlap between the fibres can be used to tune coupling. Thus one D-fibre could be embedded in the composite and another coupled D-fibre can be located in a blister module attached to the composite.

Other coupling concepts that could be used to couple light between a blister module and the associated composite structure include etched fibre grooves (facets cut in the side of fibre to allow lateral coupling), in-fibre gratings (again for side coupling) and holographic elements. Alignment constraints can be eased using collimated beamlets as described above in relation to Figure 2 or alternatively, TEC (Thermally Expanded Core) fibre. The interface scheme adopted depends on factors such as the composite geometry, system power budget and the sensing architecture.

In the embodiment of Figure 3, a light source could be arranged to launch light directly into the composite panel interface 36 and could be powered from a remote umbilical electrical link attached to the blister. A further fibre link could output information to a remote location where sensor data would be displayed. All fibres or electrical power leads emerging from the blister module could be cabled together into a common cable construction.

A light source in the blister module 10; 30 could transmit sensor data back to a remote location after interrogation within the module. This light source could be a

second light source used to launch into the embedded optical fibre and could be integrated into the blister module 10; 30 to transmit data over fibre. Also, the sensor data light could be amplified in the blister module 10; 30, for example in an optical fibre amplifier integrated within the module, before that amplified light travels out of the module on an optical link to be interrogated externally.

The blister module 10; 30 could have fibre connectors on its exposed surface(s), for example to one side, so as to allow optical/electrical connectors to be de-coupled. The connectors could be discrete single-way or integrated optical or electrical contacts within a multi-way connector. Such connectors would contribute an element of strain relief.

Whilst the blister module 10; 30 of the illustrated embodiments has a flat bottom mating surface to match a flat external surface of the composite structure, it will be apparent that neither the blister module 10; 30 nor the composite structure 12 has to define flat surfaces: other mating surface shapes are possible, as will generally be imposed by the shape of the composite structure 12. It is also possible for the blister module or pod to be of a non-domed geometry such as a cuboid of rectangular, e.g. square, cross-section or plan.

### CLAIMS

1. A surface-mountable interface module for attachment to a composite structure to interface with an optical transmission means embedded in the composite structure, the module containing interface optics to manipulate light that, in use, passes between the module and the optical transmission means, and interrogation means for interrogating a sensor system associated with the optical transmission means.
2. The module of Claim 1, wherein the interrogation means comprises sensor means for sensing parameters of light entering the module from the optical transmission means embedded in the composite structure.
3. The module of Claim 2, including data output means for outputting sensor data from the sensor means to a remote location for display and/or processing.
4. The module of any preceding Claim and being suitable for attachment to a central surface portion of the composite structure, the module having a mating surface for coupling to the composite structure to define an intersection between the module and the central surface portion, and wherein the interface optics manipulate light that, in use, passes between the module and the optical transmission means through the intersection.
5. The module of Claim 4, including beam-turning means for turning light from or into a direction substantially parallel to the central surface portion of the composite structure, respectively before or after the passage of said light through the intersection.
6. The module of Claim 4 or 5, wherein the mating surface is penetrated by an optical port communicating with the interface optics within the module.

7. The module of any preceding Claim, and being arranged to present a streamlined exposed surface when the module is attached to the composite structure.
8. The module of any preceding Claim, wherein the interface optics comprise an optical interface portion adapted to interface with a co-operating optical interface portion in the composite structure.
9. The module of any preceding Claim, comprising locating formations adapted to co-operate with complementary locating formations in or on the composite structure.
10. The module of any preceding Claim, comprising integral sensor components.
11. A composite structure comprising a support structure carrying an embedded optical transmission means, and having an interface module as defined in any preceding Claim attached thereto in optical communication with the embedded optical transmission means.
12. A method of making the composite structure of Claim 11, the method comprising forming a passageway in the support structure to create an optical port between the embedded optical transmission means and the exterior of the composite structure, and attaching an interface module as defined in any of Claims 1 to 10 to the composite structure over the optical port.



1/1

Fig.1.

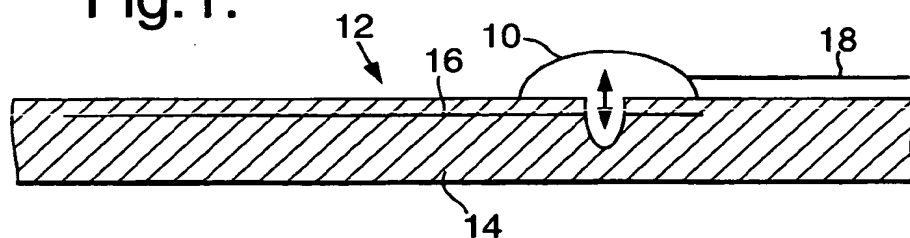


Fig.2.

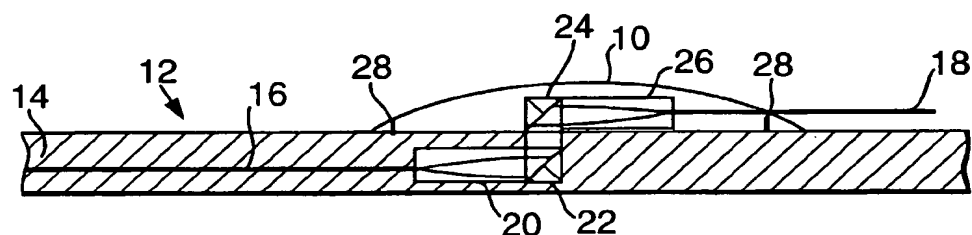
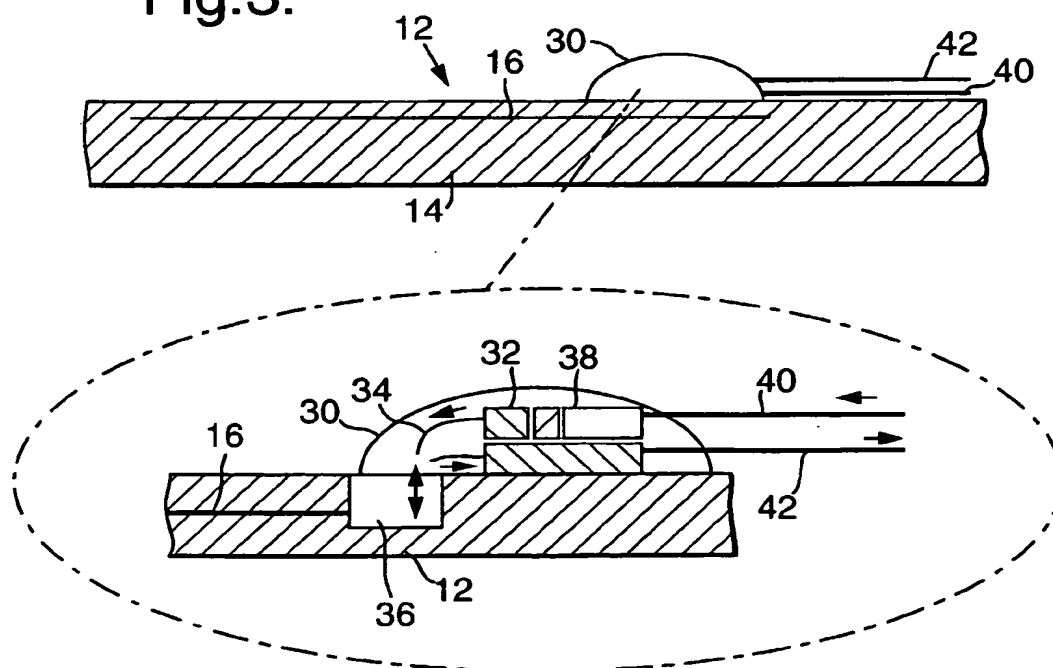


Fig.3.



# INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No

PCT/GB 01/01797

**A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER**  
IPC 7 G02B6/42 G02B6/12

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

## B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC 7 G02B

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

Electronic data base consulted during the international search (name of data base and, where practical, search terms used)

EPO-Internal, PAJ, WPI Data, INSPEC

## C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
X	DE 198 26 648 A (SIEMENS AG) 30 December 1999 (1999-12-30) column 1, line 55 - line 57 column 3, line 2 - line 20 figures 1,2	1-12
X	DE 198 38 519 A (BOSCH GMBH ROBERT) 2 March 2000 (2000-03-02) figures 2,3 column 3, line 63 - line 68 column 4, line 54 - column 5, line 67 --- -/--	1-12



Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.



Patent family members are listed in annex.

\* Special categories of cited documents:

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- \*X\* document of particular relevance; the claimed invention cannot be considered novel or cannot be considered to involve an inventive step when the document is taken alone
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Date of the actual completion of the international search

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Date of mailing of the international search report

17/09/2001

Name and mailing address of the ISA

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# INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No

PCT/GB 01/01797

## C.(Continuation) DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	FRIEBELE E J ET AL: "OPTICAL FIBER SENSORS FOR SPACECRAFT APPLICATIONS" SMART MATERIALS AND STRUCTURES, IOP PUBLISHING LTD., BRISTOL, GB, vol. 8, no. 6, December 1999 (1999-12), pages 813-838, XP000883621 ISSN: 0964-1726 ----	
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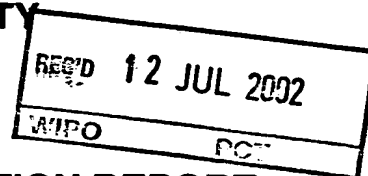
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## PATENT COOPERATION TREATY

PCT



## INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION REPORT

(PCT Article 36 and Rule 70)

10/089,890



Applicant's or agent's file reference XA1381	<b>FOR FURTHER ACTION</b>		See Notification of Transmittal of International Preliminary Examination Report (Form PCT/IPEA/416)
International application No. PCT/GB01/01797	International filing date (day/month/year) 20/04/2001	Priority date (day/month/year) 27/04/2000	
International Patent Classification (IPC) or national classification and IPC G02B6/42			<b>RECEIVED</b> DEC 17 2002
Applicant BAE SYSTEMS PLC et al.			Technology Center 2600

- This international preliminary examination report has been prepared by this International Preliminary Examining Authority and is transmitted to the applicant according to Article 36.
- This REPORT consists of a total of 5 sheets, including this cover sheet.  
  
☒ This report is also accompanied by ANNEXES, i.e. sheets of the description, claims and/or drawings which have been amended and are the basis for this report and/or sheets containing rectifications made before this Authority (see Rule 70.16 and Section 607 of the Administrative Instructions under the PCT).  
  
 These annexes consist of a total of 6 sheets.

- This report contains indications relating to the following items:

- I ☒ Basis of the report
- II ☐ Priority
- III ☐ Non-establishment of opinion with regard to novelty, inventive step and industrial applicability
- IV ☐ Lack of unity of invention
- V ☒ Reasoned statement under Article 35(2) with regard to novelty, inventive step or industrial applicability; citations and explanations supporting such statement
- VI ☐ Certain documents cited
- VII ☐ Certain defects in the international application
- VIII ☐ Certain observations on the international application

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Date of submission of the demand  29/10/2001	Date of completion of this report  19.06.2002
Name and mailing address of the international preliminary examining authority:   European Patent Office - P.B. 5818 Patentlaan 2 NL-2280 HV Rijswijk - Pays Bas Tel. +31 70 340 - 2040 Tx: 31 651 epo nl Fax: +31 70 340 - 3016	Authorized officer  Verbandt, Y  Telephone No. +31 70 340 2939  

EA

# INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION REPORT

International application No. PCT/GB01/01797

## I. Basis of the report

1. With regard to the **elements** of the international application (*Replacement sheets which have been furnished to the receiving Office in response to an invitation under Article 14 are referred to in this report as "originally filed" and are not annexed to this report since they do not contain amendments (Rules 70.16 and 70.17)*):

### Description, pages:

1-3,8-13	as originally filed			
4-7	as received on	13/04/2002	with letter of	28/03/2002

### Claims, No.:

1-10	as received on	13/04/2002	with letter of	28/03/2002
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### Drawings, sheets:

1/1	as originally filed
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2. With regard to the **language**, all the elements marked above were available or furnished to this Authority in the language in which the international application was filed, unless otherwise indicated under this item.

These elements were available or furnished to this Authority in the following language: , which is:

- ☐ the language of a translation furnished for the purposes of the international search (under Rule 23.1(b)).
- ☐ the language of publication of the international application (under Rule 48.3(b)).
- ☐ the language of a translation furnished for the purposes of international preliminary examination (under Rule 55.2 and/or 55.3).

3. With regard to any **nucleotide and/or amino acid sequence** disclosed in the international application, the international preliminary examination was carried out on the basis of the sequence listing:

- ☐ contained in the international application in written form.
- ☐ filed together with the international application in computer readable form.
- ☐ furnished subsequently to this Authority in written form.
- ☐ furnished subsequently to this Authority in computer readable form.
- ☐ The statement that the subsequently furnished written sequence listing does not go beyond the disclosure in the international application as filed has been furnished.
- ☐ The statement that the information recorded in computer readable form is identical to the written sequence listing has been furnished.

4. The amendments have resulted in the cancellation of:

# INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY EXAMINATION REPORT

International application No. PCT/GB01/01797

- ☐ the description,      pages:
- ☐ the claims,      Nos.:
- ☐ the drawings,      sheets:

5. ☐ This report has been established as if (some of) the amendments had not been made, since they have been considered to go beyond the disclosure as filed (Rule 70.2(c)):

*(Any replacement sheet containing such amendments must be referred to under item 1 and annexed to this report.)*

6. Additional observations, if necessary:

## V. Reasoned statement under Article 35(2) with regard to novelty, inventive step or industrial applicability; citations and explanations supporting such statement

### 1. Statement

Novelty (N)	Yes:	Claims	1-10
	No:	Claims	
Inventive step (IS)	Yes:	Claims	
	No:	Claims	1-10
Industrial applicability (IA)	Yes:	Claims	1-10
	No:	Claims	

2. Citations and explanations  
**see separate sheet**

**INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY  
EXAMINATION REPORT - SEPARATE SHEET**

International application No. PCT/GB01/01797

The examination is being carried out on the **following application documents**:

Text for the Contracting States:

AT BE CH DE DK ES FI FR GB GR IT IE LI LU MC NL PT SE

**Description, pages:**

1-3,8-13 as originally filed

4-7 as received on 13/04/2002 with letter of 28/03/2002

**Claims, No.:**

1-10 as received on 13/04/2002 with letter of 28/03/2002

**Drawings, sheets:**

1/1 as originally filed

**Re Item I**

**Basis of the opinion**

Reference is made to the following documents:

- D1: DE 198 26 648 A (SIEMENS AG) 30 December 1999 (1999-12-30)  
D2: FRIEBELE E J ET AL: 'OPTICAL FIBER SENSORS FOR SPACECRAFT APPLICATIONS'  
SMART MATERIALS AND STRUCTURES, IOP PUBLISHING LTD., BRISTOL, GB, vol. 8, no.  
6, December 1999 (1999-12), pages 813-838, XP000883621 ISSN: 0964-1726

**Re Item V**

**Reasoned statement under Article 35(2) with regard to novelty, inventive step or industrial applicability; citations and explanations supporting such statement**

Document D1 is regarded as being the closest prior art to the subject-matter of claim 1, and discloses (the references in parentheses applying to Figure 1 of this document) a composite structure (layers 1,2, and 3) :

- carrying an embedded optical transmission means (layer 1),
- having a surface-mountable interface module attached thereto (4), in optical communication with the embedded optical transmission means, which contains
  - \* interface optics (9) to manipulate the light that passes between the module and the optical transmission means, and
  - \* interrogation means (4) for interrogation of the light signal from the embedded waveguide.

From this claim 1 differs in that



**INTERNATIONAL PRELIMINARY  
EXAMINATION REPORT - SEPARATE SHEET**

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International application No. PCT/GB01/01797

- the composite structure comprises an aircraft panel, and that
- the interrogation means is used for interrogating a sensor system associated with the optical transmission means.

The fact that aircraft panels are made out of composites is well-known to the skilled person. The same goes for the use of a detector for capturing the optical signals which originate from an optical sensor system.

Finally, it could be argued that the technical field of composite structures for aircraft is too remote from the field of the much smaller-scale optical circuit boards to apply solutions from the latter field in the former without inventive skills. However, the scale of the waveguides is the identical (it depends on the wavelength of the guided light) in both applications. Hence, the requirements of the optics for solving the problem of coupling light in and out the embedded waveguide are the same in the two fields.

In conclusion, the subject-matter of claim 1 is considered not to involve an inventive step (Article 33(3) PCT).

Dependent claims 2-10 do not contain any features which, in combination with the features of any claim to which they refer, meet the requirements of the PCT in respect of inventive step, the reasons being as follows: All features are disclosed by D1.

to speed the implementation of embedded fibre systems in the aerospace industry.

The invention resides in a composite structure comprising an aircraft panel carrying an embedded optical transmission means, and having a surface-mountable interface module attached thereto in optical communication with the embedded optical transmission means, wherein the interface module contains interface optics to manipulate light that, in use, passes between the module and the optical transmission means, and interrogation means for interrogating a sensor system associated with the optical transmission means.

The interrogation means can comprise sensor means for sensing parameters of light entering the module from the optical transmission means embedded in the aircraft panel. The module can then include data output means for outputting sensor data from the sensor means to a remote location for display and/or processing.

The module of the invention is advantageously suitable for attachment to a central surface portion of the aircraft panel and has a mating surface for coupling to the aircraft panel to define an intersection between the module and the central surface portion. The interface optics therefore manipulate light that, in use, passes between the module and the optical transmission means through the intersection.

This specification ascribes a particular meaning to 'central surface portion' which is an interior portion of a surface, in the sense of being surrounded by other portions of that surface in a landlocked manner. This is to be distinguished from a peripheral portion of the surface defining an edge because, unlike the bulky edge-mounted optical connectors of the prior art, the module of the invention is suitable for application to such a central surface portion. However, the module of the invention could also be applied to a peripheral surface portion if needs be.

For optimum compactness, the module preferably includes beam-turning means for turning light from or into a direction substantially parallel to the central surface portion of the composite structure, respectively before or after the passage of said light through the intersection.

In general, it is advantageous for the module to present a streamlined exposed surface when the module is attached to the aircraft panel with the mating surface coupled to the central surface portion of the aircraft panel. The exposed surface may therefore have a convex, dome-like structure of part-elliptical cross-section. It is also possible for the exposed surface to be cuboidal. The term 'blister' is used in the description that follows to convey the idea of a small raised module that can sit neatly on the surface of the aircraft panel.

As the central surface portion of the aircraft panel will often be substantially planar, the mating surface can also be substantially planar. In cross-section, the mating surface and the exposed surface of the module advantageously intersect around the periphery of the module at an acute mutual internal angle.

Elegantly, the mating surface of the module is preferably penetrated by an optical port that communicates with the interface optics within the module. Those interface optics, which can be embedded within the module for optimum robustness, suitably comprise an optical interface portion adapted to interface with a co-operating optical interface portion in the aircraft panel.

The module may further comprise an external optical transmission means, which means may be a fibre optic link. A secondary light source can be integrated within the module to launch light into the external optical transmission means, as can an amplifier means to amplify light thus launched.

Locating formations such as one or more pins may be provided to co-operate with complementary locating formations in or on the aircraft panel.

It is preferred that the module includes some integral sensor components such as a filter or a coupler.

The module can contain a light source means to generate light and to launch that light directly or indirectly into the optical transmission means embedded in the aircraft panel. For instance, the light source means can be coupled to the interface optics of the module or can be arranged to launch light directly into an interface within the aircraft panel.

Power means can be included within the module for powering components within the module as may be necessary. The power means may comprise opto-electronic power means for receiving optical energy and converting that energy into electrical energy, in which case provision may be made for a multi-mode optical fibre link to convey optical energy to the module. Alternatively, the power means can be powered via an umbilical electrical power link.

Where external power or data links are connected to the module, the module conveniently comprises externally-accessible optical or electrical connectors to enable releasable attachment of the power or data links to the module.

Accordingly, the invention presents a module that interfaces simply onto the surface of an aircraft panel, enabling light to be introduced/extracted from an embedded fibre system and having the potential to integrate interrogation components also within the module. Given that an optical interface can be formed in this way, the invention allows use of this interface together with integration of sensor interrogation components. The invention includes a module that uses this interface in an efficient

manner and a structure to which the module is attached.

In order that this invention can be more readily understood, reference will now be made, by way of example, to the accompanying drawings in which:

Figure 1 is a schematic sectional side view of a simple surface blister concept in which the blister module houses one half of an optical interface and connection to a fibre optic link, and in which interrogation of the embedded fibre system is performed remotely;

Figure 2 is an enlarged and more detailed schematic sectional side view corresponding to Figure 1, showing a blister module providing one half of the

**CLAIMS**

1. A composite structure comprising an aircraft panel carrying an embedded optical transmission means, and having a surface-mountable interface module attached thereto in optical communication with the embedded optical transmission means, wherein the interface module contains interface optics to manipulate light that, in use, passes between the module and the optical transmission means, and interrogation means for interrogating a sensor system associated with the optical transmission means.
2. The composite structure of Claim 1, wherein the interrogation means of the interface module comprises sensor means for sensing parameters of light entering the module from the optical transmission means embedded in the aircraft panel.
3. The composite structure of Claim 2, wherein the interface module includes data output means for outputting sensor data from the sensor means to a remote location for display and/or processing.
4. The composite structure of any preceding Claim, wherein the interface module is suitable for attachment to a central surface portion of the aircraft panel, the module having a mating surface for coupling to the aircraft panel to define an intersection between the module and the central surface portion, and wherein the interface optics manipulate light that, in use, passes between the module and the optical transmission means through the intersection.
5. The composite structure of Claim 4, wherein the interface module includes beam-turning means for turning light from or into a direction substantially parallel to the central surface portion of the aircraft panel, respectively before or after the passage of said light through the intersection.

6. The composite structure of Claim 4 or 5, wherein the mating surface of the interface module is penetrated by an optical port communicating with the interface optics within the module.
7. The composite structure of any preceding Claim, wherein the interface module is arranged to present a streamlined exposed surface when the module is attached to the aircraft panel.
8. The composite structure of any preceding Claim, wherein the interface optics of the interface module comprise an optical interface portion adapted to interface with a co-operating optical interface portion in the aircraft panel.
9. The composite structure of any preceding Claim, wherein the interface module comprises locating formations adapted to co-operate with complementary locating formations in or on the aircraft panel.
10. The composite structure of any preceding Claim, wherein the interface module comprises integral sensor components.

## PATENT COOPERATION TREATY

PCT

## INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

(PCT Article 18 and Rules 43 and 44)

Applicant's or agent's file reference <b>XA1381</b>	<b>FOR FURTHER ACTION</b> see Notification of Transmittal of International Search Report (Form PCT/ISA/220) as well as, where applicable, item 5 below.	
International application No. <b>PCT/GB 01/ 01797</b>	International filing date (day/month/year) <b>20/04/2001</b>	(Earliest) Priority Date (day/month/year) <b>27/04/2000</b>
Applicant <b>BAE SYSTEMS PLC et al.</b>		

This International Search Report has been prepared by this International Searching Authority and is transmitted to the applicant according to Article 18. A copy is being transmitted to the International Bureau.

This International Search Report consists of a total of 3 sheets.



It is also accompanied by a copy of each prior art document cited in this report.

## 1. Basis of the report

- a. With regard to the **language**, the international search was carried out on the basis of the international application in the language in which it was filed, unless otherwise indicated under this item.



the international search was carried out on the basis of a translation of the international application furnished to this Authority (Rule 23.1(b)).

- b. With regard to any **nucleotide and/or amino acid sequence** disclosed in the international application, the international search was carried out on the basis of the sequence listing :



contained in the international application in written form.



filed together with the international application in computer readable form.



furnished subsequently to this Authority in written form.



furnished subsequently to this Authority in computer readable form.



the statement that the subsequently furnished written sequence listing does not go beyond the disclosure in the international application as filed has been furnished.



the statement that the information recorded in computer readable form is identical to the written sequence listing has been furnished

2. ☐ **Certain claims were found unsearchable** (See Box I).

3. ☐ **Unity of invention is lacking** (see Box II).

4. With regard to the **title**,



the text is approved as submitted by the applicant.



the text has been established by this Authority to read as follows:

**SURFACE-MOUNTABLE INTERFACE MODULE FOR INTERROGATION OF EMBEDDED OPTICAL SENSOR**  
**S**

5. With regard to the **abstract**,



the text is approved as submitted by the applicant.



the text has been established, according to Rule 38.2(b), by this Authority as it appears in Box III. The applicant may, within one month from the date of mailing of this international search report, submit comments to this Authority.

6. The figure of the **drawings** to be published with the abstract is Figure No.



as suggested by the applicant.



because the applicant failed to suggest a figure.



because this figure better characterizes the invention.

2



None of the figures.